

Ep #297: Goal Disappointment and the Arrival Fallacy



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With Your Host

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Welcome to the podcast. You are listening to episode 297. Let's talk about goal disappointments.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen, then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Alright folks, welcome back to the podcast. There's a really important aspect of goal-getting that we haven't covered on the podcast yet. I've mentioned it briefly, but today we're getting into it. And it's what I describe as goal disappointment.

So, think about a time where you achieved something. You created a result in your life that was meaningful to you in some way. And maybe you were building up to it for a while or there were challenges along the way. Or it was something you've had in your head that you wanted to do for decades and then you finally do it. And you expect to feel amazing, after all the rain and the misery and the challenge of getting there. It's all in the past.

Now you've achieved your goal; you've done what you set out to do. And it's like you're just expecting the clouds to part, the sun to stream through, its rays land on you, your whole being warms up and just eliminates any negativity from your being. And everyone's there giving you a round of applause, and there's a parade and all of those things, which is of course not how it goes. So, you might feel fantastic for a moment or a little bit, but it doesn't last.

And it's disappointing because you expected your life to be forever changed, which it is, but it's like once you got there you thought you'd just feel great and that you would never think a negative thought about yourself or feel crap ever again. This thing was just going to solve your life somehow. And then what often happens is you think that there's something wrong with you for not being super happy and just being all full of life and celebration.

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So let me give you an example. Let's say you've always wanted to run a marathon. And after months of training, you finally cross the finish line and there's that initial euphoria and sense of accomplishment and celebration, but that doesn't last forever; it's not meant to. And so that feeling fades and it's just like, is that it? What now? Do I have to keep running marathons to try and feel this way about myself?

Or it could be that you're training in something and you're working towards receiving a qualification and then you finally get it, you get that piece of paper and you think, well, once I get that piece of paper, I'm going to feel confident. I'm going to feel this way. And you get it, and actually no, it doesn't quite work like that, I'm afraid. So, this is what's known as arrival fallacy. The idea that achieving a certain goal is going to make you happy or fulfilled and just a completely different person. And that once you reach that goal, you will have arrived.

So, it's the belief that our lives are going to feel complete once we reach a certain destination or acquire a certain possession. And then the disappointment that can come with realising that that's not actually the case. So, it's a fallacy because it's not true. And there is no one thing or no one person, no one possession, no one achievement that's going to make you feel like that. I know that on a cognitive level you've probably realised this before but that's different to actually believing it in your body.

So I just want you to let that sink in for a moment, that thing that you want, whether it's a qualification, your body being a certain size or looking a certain way, an amount of money, a possession, any of those things. None of those things have the ability to make you feel great, none of them. But we're conditioned to believe that success and achievements are the keys to happiness and feeling fulfilled. And we're told from a young age that we should strive for success in school, your career, your personal life.

And achieving all these milestones, owning possessions, etc., it's going to make you happy. It's just this cultural message that's hard to shake even when you know better. And we know it on a cognitive level we can still fall into the trap of it. So, the idea that external accomplishments and owning

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possessions etc, is going to make you feel happy is a common societal narrative that's reinforced by media and advertising. That if you achieve a certain status or accumulate enough stuff or wealth that you're suddenly going to feel enough. It just doesn't work like that.

So, here's what I recommend. Instead of focusing on reaching a place of the arrival that's based on your external achievements, focus on arriving within yourself. What would it be like to fully arrive in you, to feel at home in yourself? This is a goal that lots of my clients set. And it's something that they work on in the membership is feeling at home in themselves and being themselves, getting comfortable accepting themselves, all of the parts, even the not so nice ones.

Because those external achievements, possessions, and the belief that we need to constantly strive for more and achieve new, better levels of success can get exhausting pretty quickly, especially if you're approaching it from this point of view. I teach my clients to do it a very different way. And it's really unfulfilling because you'll never feel fulfilled. This is why I place such a huge emphasis on setting goals that are for you and on setting those internal goals too, alongside external ones.

But even with an external goal like a promotion, a new job, moving, creating something, finishing a project, any of those things. You can shift your focus away from the end result, that place that you think you're going to get to and feel amazing. And instead focus on all the results along the way including who you're becoming in the process. So, let's look at an example of how this might work in practice.

Let's say you're working towards a promotion at work. Many of my clients are doing this. Instead of only focusing on the end result of getting the promotion, signing the contract, etc., which is important. What about all the other results that happen along the way, the skills and knowledge that you gain, the relationships you're building, the challenges you're overcoming, who you're becoming in the process, your self-concept, how you think of yourself? All of that can happen along the way. So, this also helps you to prevent getting attached to a specific outcome.

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So rather than getting a promotion in a specific role at a specific company, it broadens you into who you become as a result of going for it. Of recognising your strengths, your talents, building your self-confidence and taking a risk and saying, "This is what I want." That's risky because it risks disappointment. But what's more disappointing: hiding your desires from yourself and lying to yourself, or saying what you want and not getting there yet? And it is a yet, I love sticking a yet on the end of a sentence.

So, focusing on who you become rather than the ultimate result is important because it helps to shift your mindset away from those external achievements and possessions that can lead to arrival fallacy, goal disappointment.

And when we focus solely on achieving a certain goal or acquiring a certain possession like that, we can lose sight of all of the growth that comes with it. And you just get so fixated on that end result that you forget about the joy of working towards it and lose sight of the person you're becoming in the process and all the other amazing results that you're creating along the way. Because isn't it joyful to do this? I know when you're working on a goal and you're in the messy middle, you're in the thick of it and it doesn't feel like things are working.

I know it doesn't feel fantastic when you're there. It's not going to feel fantastic all the time because it is joyful to work on these things. I know it doesn't feel fantastic all the time when you're in the thick of it, when you're in the messy middle, when you're struggling, and it feels hard and like it's not working and it's never going to. And it's very confronting and you're kind of wondering why on Earth you decided to do this to yourself. That doesn't feel delightful, but isn't it worth it? I think it is. All the failures, the perseverance, it's always worth it.

The resiliency that comes from it will help you in ways that you can't even imagine when you're in the thick of it, especially when you're in the thick of it, that kind of perspective just isn't available usually. Those challenges, the setbacks, they're all opportunities for growth and learning rather than obstacles to your ultimate goal, they're opportunities. And when you focus

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on who you are becoming, that helps you to cultivate a sense of inner fulfilment rather than relying on those external achievements to provide that sense of satisfaction.

When you focus on who you're becoming through this process, that's how you cultivate a sense of inner fulfilment rather than relying on external achievements and certain milestones and markers to provide that sense of satisfaction. So when you're prioritising that and your growth and celebrating yourself all the way through, that's how you can avoid the pitfall of arrival fallacy. And you won't feel disappointed when you get there. It will just become, of course I'm here.

It's completely different because when you succeed and you will succeed, I want you to be able to celebrate yourself for getting there. That's really important. But I also want you to celebrate yourself along the way. And what's interesting, as I've just hinted, is that when you place less emphasis on that end result and expecting it to transform your life like someone's just waved a magic wand and everything's changed. That actually stops being the be-all and end-all. It's still amazing, it's still worth celebrating, of course.

But by that point your success has become so inevitable that you've already arrived before the actual result is created. And if your brain is just like, "What on Earth is she talking about?" Just pay attention to this. Pay attention to what happens when you're working on a goal and as you build belief in yourself. Because what happens is when you do that work you arrive in that place before you've actually completed the result. That's what I mean, where it just becomes inevitable. It's like, of course, I'm here. I got here actually before I arrived.

And then there's no disappointment. And what's great about this is that you stop requiring other people to believe in you and support you and celebrate you. Don't get me wrong, it's lovely when they do that, but if you're relying on it then you're just making life hard for yourself and setting yourself up for even more disappointment and anger and resentment and all the other stuff that goes on too. And as you can imagine, I've spoken about this recently,

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perfectionism can come into play so can self-worth. They can both play a significant role in the development or arrival fallacy.

Perfectionism is the tendency to strive for flawlessness and set extremely high standards for yourself. And when you have a perfectionist mindset you're more likely to fixate on that end result of your efforts rather than the process of getting there and use that as like a measuring stick to beat yourself up because you're never going to get there. That's the thing about when you have a perfectionist mindset, you just keep raising the bar. And even when you achieve things, even when they are carried out flawlessly, it's still not good enough because that inner critic is just raging all the time.

And that just leads to this preoccupation with achieving external markers of success and just a continual sense of disappointment or dissatisfaction if those markers aren't met. And with all of that, a low tolerance for being less than. And then when it comes to your self-worth, which is how you perceive your value, your worthiness is also going to impact the development of arrival fallacy.

So when your self-worth is tied to your external achievements, your possessions, having a certain status, you'll feel a sense of validation and worthiness only when those external markers of success are there, but of course, it doesn't feel as great as you expect it to be. And that all creates a sense of pressure to constantly strive for more, and just this cycle of never feeling satisfied or worthy and pushing yourself. I know that's going to be a familiar cycle to many of you.

And it just perpetuates the cycle of constantly achieving more, reaching new levels of success in order to feel fulfilled and satisfied, but you can't give yourself any credit for it because it's just like you need to move on to the next thing. And it leads to a preoccupation with those external markers of success and a lack of appreciation for the process of growth and who you're becoming along the way, ultimately leading to goal disappointment and a dissatisfaction. Whether those external markers are met or not, it's there.

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So, to overcome that sense of goal disappointment, especially in the context of perfectionism and self-worth, move away from those external achievements and possessions, go towards internal growth. This involves cultivating a growth mindset, embracing failure as a natural part of the learning process, which it is, taking messy, imperfect action. We talk about this a lot in the membership. And that sense of self-worth that isn't dependent on external markers of success.

You don't need to achieve certain markers of success in order to be worthy or valuable. I'm unofficially saying that to you all. You are worthy and wonderful just as you. When you're focused on solely achieving a specific outcome, like a certain job title, a financial milestone, a relationship status, you get very attached to the end result rather than the process of getting there. That's where those feelings of disappointment, disillusionment and even burnout, when you do finally get there or even before that.

And you just feel very disappointed to realise that it doesn't bring you the happiness or satisfaction that you expected. Now, that doesn't mean that you can't have those goals, by all means have them, you know I'm all for them. But don't be thinking that achieving them will make you better than you are, or that they'll make your life better in some way. They will in some ways, and they won't in some ways. That's just how it goes and you're still going to have your brain. It's not like you get a promotion and a brain transplant comes with it. Your brain comes with you.

All those thoughts that you have about yourself are still going to be there unless you've explored them and unwound them and started cultivating a different mindset, which is exactly what I teach you how to do inside the membership. So, you don't need to achieve perfection. You don't need to be perfect in order to be successful or worthy because that will just lead to the experience of never feeling like you've truly arrived. The same thing happens when we're constantly focused on what we don't have. We're never going to be satisfied.

But when we work on arriving in ourselves, feeling gratitude for what we do have. That's going to be a completely different experience, even if you don't

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achieve all your goals, that's what's amazing. You can work on a goal for some time and not get there, but still have got there within yourself and completely changed your relationship with yourself, maybe with others, changed some things that are just really significant to you. And then it might be like, actually I don't want that goal that I was working on that I thought, but it still got you there to a place within yourself.

It's so important as you're doing this kind of stuff to stop and enjoy the view, to recognise and appreciate what you have already accomplished. This is one of the reasons why we celebrate so hard in our community instead of waiting till it's done. Imagine that, imagine if instead of celebrating everything along the way and paying attention to what is going well and all of those things. The rule in our community was, no, you can't celebrate until you can come here and tell us that you have achieved your goal perfectly.

Just think about that, and for those of you who are in the community, be like, "What?" It makes no sense, does it? But this is what some of you are doing inside yourselves. You're not letting yourself celebrate along the way. You're like, "No, it all has to be done, then I can celebrate, then I can feel good about myself." And you don't unless you unwind it all. It just makes no sense to do it that way, does it? So instead of waiting till it's done, we celebrate every step of the way including the fuckups and the failures, the challenges, the setbacks, the moments of glory and who you're becoming as a result of it all.

That's why we focus on what's working because your brain's always going to go to what isn't. It just has a negativity bias that means it goes off in that direction, what hasn't been done, what you're not good at, what still has to happen. You have to train your brain to go in another direction and really celebrate everything along the way, all of your successes. And finally, remember that disappointment is a normal part of life.

We're not always going to get what we want the way that we want it to happen. That's okay, it's okay to feel disappointed. It's likely highlighting that something is important and meaningful to you. You wouldn't feel

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disappointed if you didn't care. Alright, folks, that is it for this week. I will catch you next time.

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